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October 1, 2002

***House Approves Carson's Arkansas River Bed Claim Settlement
Legislation Would End 95 Year Dispute***

Washington, D.C. --

The House of Representatives tonight passed the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Nations Claims Settlement Act sponsored by Oklahoma Congressmen Brad Carson (D-OK2) and Wes Watkins (R-OK3). This legislation, if approved by the Senate and signed by President Bush, would end the 95-year dispute between the three tribes and the federal government. Congressman Carson's bill would compensate the three tribes for land and resources wrongfully taken from them when Oklahoma became a state in 1907. In exchange for compensation, the tribes agree to dismiss and release claims asserted against the United States in the Court of Federal Claims. The leaders of the affected tribal nations, Principal Chief Chad Smith of the Cherokee Nation, Governor Bill Anoatubby of the Chickasaw Nation, and Chief Gregory Pyle of the Choctaw Nation, are in unanimous support of this legislation.

"I commend the House of Representatives for acting, and supporting, this important legislation," Congressman Carson said. "This issue has plagued eastern Oklahoma for far too long, and it corrects a wrong the federal government committed in its relations with these three tribes. In settling this matter, the federal government will provide due compensation to the tribes, while also eliminating ongoing litigation."

In the 1830s, the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations were forcibly removed from their land to Indian Territory, present day Oklahoma. The United States government ceded the land in this territory to the tribes. The Arkansas River was part of this territory. In 1907, due to an erroneous legal opinion, the Arkansas riverbed was conveyed to the new state of Oklahoma under the Equal Footing Doctrine. The tribes, however, had entered into agreement with the federal government before the Equal Footing Doctrine was adopted. In 1970, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Choctaw Nation v. Oklahoma* that the tribes were the rightful owners of the riverbed.

From statehood until the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in 1970, the Bureau of Indian Affairs acted on the assumption that Oklahoma owned the riverbed and took no action to protect tribal resources. During the construction of the McClellan-Kerr Navigation Way

on the Arkansas River, natural resources belonging to the three tribes were used, and compensation was denied.

The Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Nations Claims Settlement Act, H.R. 3534, authorizes \$40 million be appropriated in four annual installments and deposited into a tribal trust fund for the Indian Nations. “Since the Supreme Court decision of 1970, there has been little disagreement that a settlement must be reached,” Congressman Carson said. “Recent discussions between federal, state, and tribal entities involved in this dispute have been extremely productive and make it appropriate we reach a conclusion. The compensation to the tribes will further economic development in the region, benefiting the tribes and every community affected.”

Congressman Brad Carson was joined with fellow Oklahoman Congressmen John Sullivan and Wes Watkins in brining this bill to a vote by the full House of Representatives. The House approved the bill by voice vote.

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